

A Rose By Any Other Name by mudhoney

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Alternate Universe, Billy Hargrove tries to help but it's not exactly like Max wants help, Eventual Smut, F/M, Mutual Pining, Running Away, Underage Substance Use, healing from past trauma, im not entirely sure where i wanna take this story yet, lot of mental health issues up in this bitch, so take these tags as a grain of salt for the time being

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Characters: Billy Hargrove, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mentions of - Character, Neil Hargrove, Sam Mayfield, Susan Hargrove

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Summary:

"I get mean when I'm nervous like a bad dog."

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Author's Note:

howdy!

i've gotta admit, i haven't written at all in recent times (must be something in the air lmao), but this. this story has been something of a passion project i forced into existence by pure will alone, so i beg of you, tell me your thoughts! i think i know what im good at when it comes to writing, so it's up to you to let me know what im not so good at so i can improve :)

thanks for clicking, i genuinely hope you enjoy <3

ps. was this story inspired by cop car by mitski? perhaps it was, observant reader.

The moon was high and bright in the starless sky, a good distraction from the busy world surrounding her. Cars honked and people yelled, only serving to remind her how completely and utterly alone she truly was, even in a place like Los Angeles.

But she had the moon overhead, her bookbag over her shoulders, and her skateboard at her side. All of which, for now, is enough.

Except her stomach felt like it was cannibalizing itself, her mouth was dry and disgusting (why wouldn't she have thought to pack water?), and her legs and feet ached sharply with each step she took.

Maybe there's hope, though. She spots a familiar diner, a small place she'd passed plenty of times in her day-to-day, and decides it couldn't hurt to get a cup of water at the very least. As she walked in, she figured she should start thinking of places to sleep.

A hotel was off the table, of course. There's a park just a few blocks from here she reminds herself. And the beach was always an option too, but a lot of homeless people shared her idea.

She felt her stomach churn inside her. Was she, herself, now to be considered homeless? 'No- stop thinking about that. That doesn't matter right now' she assured herself, finally sitting down in the furthest booth from the door. This wasn't the time to think, to feel.

Her muscles still ached as she sat there, but now wasn't any time to pay mind to those either. At least the diner was mostly dead, all except for a blonde man with his back turned to her sat in a leather jacket, nursing a coffee between two large, bruised, and cut hands.

Everything felt unreal.

The florescent above her flickered, the smell of coffee wafted through the air, and, just to her left, the moon could be seen peeking between two tall buildings.

She assumed it must just be shock. With time, feelings will follow. There's no use in rushing things.

The waitress, an older woman dressed in a pink and white checkered uniform with the nametag 'Grace', was soon stood at the end of her booth with a notepad in one hand and pencil in the other.

"What can I getcha started with, sweetheart?" The woman's voice was unexpectedly gravelly and hoarse, only managing to yank the copper-haired girl back to reality.

"Oh- um, yeah... can I get a water?"

The woman, Grace, nodded and sent the girl before her a smile. "Anything else? Or would you like some time to think."

"Uh, just a bit more time, thanks." She said, then regretted saying. She knew she probably wasn't going to get anything to eat, given she'd only managed to save \$145, plus finding an extra 20 around the house. It, as is, wasn't even close to what she needed if she wanted to get to Big Bear.

Grace left her presence, only to be replaced by the man she'd seen earlier. And he's brought his coffee.

"Mind if I sit?" Before even being given the chance to reply, the man

had already found himself sat across from the redhead.

Her mouth fell slightly ajar, eyes growing momentarily wide before she shook her head. "What?" A moment to regain her bearings "Yes, I do mind. *Leave*."

The man's eyes lit up with delight, something the girl hadn't been expecting.

"What are you, some type of child prostitute?"

"What the *fuck* did you just call me?" Anger, hot and bright white, struck her chest. The fuck was this man trying to prove? Before she had much time to react, to feel her anger thoroughly, his mouth was already forming a reply.

"It's a genuine question, no need to get offended." A small, amused smirk pulled at his lips. "And... are you here alone?"

"You somehow couldn't have thought to ask me that first? Couldn't have thought to ask me anything else over whether or not I'm a kid whore?" She threw her words at him as though they were sharp and eager to cut, anything to wipe that smirk from his face.

"No, because that's not what I now want to know. I wanna know why you're here, sitting across from me when you should be at home, sleeping in your bed. You gotta admit, it is a bit strange you're here all alone." He put his elbows on the table, black coffee still in one hand.

"What's 'a bit strange' is you hounding a stranger with questions they don't even want to answer. You don't know me, and I'd like to keep it that way."

Still, she didn't move. Not that she thought she should, after all, it was *her* table he'd sat at.

His face kept completely neutral as he absorbed and digested what it was she was saying. Why did he care to even come over here in the first place? It wasn't like he'd be able to help her anyway, so what was with the interest?

Maybe it was the bruises on her arms, scattered in their placement, some being more healed than others. He'd figured under her ripped jeans her legs were probably marked with similar-looking yet-to-be-healed skin.

Maybe it was something in her sea-glass-colored eyes with the plum crescents that hung below them, something that held promises of underlying rage towards the world. He recognized it in himself, somewhat, not that he'd ever own up to it.

Or maybe it had to do with the way she presented herself, leaning comfortably back in the booth they shared, even though everything about her -the way the cords in her neck shown tight, the way her bottom lip was cherry red in some places, bitten raw, the way her eyes flickered around the diner in a quick examination of her surroundings- screamed tense discomfort.

"When did you last eat?"

She was tempted to roll her eyes, yet managed against doing so. He didn't get to know her life. "This morning." Lie.

"Breakfast is the most important meal of the day, or so they say." It seemed she had more important issues to work through compared to when she last ate, but still, food was a necessity, and if she was as smart as he thought she was, he knew she knew not to pass up a free meal. "Do you want a burger or something?" Slowly, without breaking the others gaze, he grabbed a menu from behind the salt and pepper shakers, sliding it across the table and before her.

Her eyes thinned as she stared at him, fully ignoring the menu he'd pushed her way. Something felt off in a way she didn't fully understand. "I'm not hungry."

He sharply scoffed. "So you just wandered into this restaurant looking for... what exactly? If you weren't hungry, why'd you come to a place where people eat?"

She'd quickly picked up on the fact he had a way of turning normal sentences into something that left you feeling insulted... yet still, she sat there facing him, arms crossed over her chest defiantly. Her

bottom lip was pulled between her teeth as she stared daggers. She wasn't going to move until he did.

"If it makes you feel any better, there are no strings attached." Maybe that'd put her at ease some, but it didn't seem to do much.

"Oh, you've got company," Grace said with a smile before setting the glass of water down, a pot of coffee held in her off-hand. "Need a refill, hun?" She asked the man-boy.

"You bet," He said, flaunting something of a smile to the woman before having his gaze land on the girl before him.

Whilst filling his cup, the waitress glanced to the girl. "Know whatcha wanna get yet?"

"I'm fi-

"Two burgers with fries, and a couple slices of apple pie." He replied. "With the prettiest of pleases," He looked to the waitress and smiled a smile the girl was sure he'd shown off often to get things he wanted, such as when the older woman playfully rolled her eyes as she turned away "Comin' right up,"

"I said I wasn't hungry."

"So you won't be hungry tomorrow either? I mean, takeout boxes exist for a reason."

Not exactly in the mood to reply, she took hold of her glass of water and sipped from it. The ice was too cold for her teeth and only added to her pre-existing headache, but the pain was a reminder that she was real. That this was real. That, as she felt the cold liquid travel down her throat and into her stomach, she was, in fact, real.

The man-boy across from her watched her as the sip she took slowly became more sips, which, after he continued to stare at her, became her almost-chugging the water.

"Jesus, take a breath, kid."

Slamming the now-empty glass down a bit harder than intended, she

wiped her mouth with the back of her hand, sea-glass eyes still glaring with that burning intensity.

"Why'd you come over here?" The girl asked blatantly, keeping herself from tacking on more offensive questions

"Dunno." He replied raspily, his leather jacket draped shoulders rose and fell.

Not buying his response, she rolled her eyes. "Did you think I was actually a child prostitute?"

"No, but what's the harm in asking?" He seemed genuine in his response, but given it was delivered with that smirk that just seemed to be begging to be wiped off his face, she decided to take his words as disingenuine. In all fairness, she thinks, she probably does look like a child prostitute, accompanied with bruises and all.

She breathes deeply through her nostrils, chest expanding before she exhales. Then, her hands are on her face. They don't feel real as they rub her eyes a bit too hard, leaving splotches and dots everywhere she looked for a few moments.

"You wanna tell me why you're here alone?" He asked, sipping his coffee. There was something kinder in his eyes now, something that made him less immediately punchable.

"No." Still, it wasn't enough to get her to want to open up to him. It wasn't nearly enough actually, nor would it probably ever be, she thinks.

She realizes she still has to figure out a safe place to sleep. Running a hand through her hair, she sighs, closing her eyes. She can feel him watching her, examining her, trying to figure her out.

He couldn't figure out how old she was. He knew a lack of sleep could make a person appear older, but it wasn't the bags under her eyes that gave him trouble pinpointing her age. It was that damn look in her eyes, the one he'd seen before in the eyes of feral alley cats and, on occasion, in his reflection.

'At least he's not forcing conversation' she thinks as she opens her

eyes, sloping down in the booth and tilting her head up to the stained and peeling ceiling tile.

"Why are you here?"

"Your turn for the questioning, huh." The man-boy replied with a half-smirk, thumb trailing the rim of his mug.

"Guess you could say that."

"Well, it definitely isn't for the company, so I guess you could say it's for the food."

There it is again, that twinge of insult. But it doesn't bother her this time- she doesn't let it.

Grace is back again with the meal he'd ordered for them, placing it before the two, then refilling the girl's glass after some remark about how thirsty she must've been. And then she's gone again, back doing whatever it is she does.

The boy starts first with the pie, shoving a mouthful past his lips as he watched her reach for a singular fry.

She had to admit, the food did smell amazing... and he did say 'no strings attached'. Before she gave herself time to think, she ate the fry. It was salty and hot and fucking *delicious* compared to the nothingness and water that'd previously occupied her mouth.

When she looked back to the boy before her, he was again with that stupid fucking smirk as he watched her reach for the burger.

"Don't look at me like that." She says before biting in, and yet he persists with the smirk.

"What? Am I not allowed to be happy?" He asks, another spoonful of pie entering his mouth. "This is the best fuckin' pie in all of LA. I've got a right to be happy."

The girl didn't bother responding at all after that.

The two ate in silence, the girl sneaking occasional glances to the

moon, being unpleasantly surprised each time she notices it's position in the sky change.

By the time their finished with their meal, the moon is completely out of sight. With the check paid by the boy across from her and her stomach now full, the girl realizes her need to find a safe place to lay her head down was becoming more and more urgent with each passing second.

"I um... I need to go." She mentally kicked herself, knowing she should've said thank you.

"Where to?"

She doesn't know what to say because nothing feels right, so she doesn't bother say anything.

Wiping his mouth with a napkin, the boy sits up. "Name's Billy. Billy Hargrove." He sticks a hand out and across from the table.

She takes Billy's unexpectedly soft hand into her smaller one, giving it a firm shake.

"I'm Max."